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Reframing the Favela, Remapping the City: Territorial Embeddedness and (Trans)locality in “Framing Content” on Brazilian Favela Blogs

Holmes, T. (2016). Reframing the Favela, Remapping the City: Territorial Embeddedness and (Trans)locality in “Framing Content” on Brazilian Favela Blogs. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 25(2), 279-319.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13569325.2016.1167017>

Published in:
Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia on 26 Apr 2016, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13569325.2016.1167017>.

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Article title: ‘Reframing the favela, remapping the city: Territorial embeddedness and (trans)locality in “framing content” on Brazilian favela blogs’

Abstract: (200 words)

In recent years, the internet has become a key site for the portrayal of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas. This article examines blogging by favela residents and argues that digital culture constitutes a vital, and as yet not systematically explored, arena of research on the representation of Rio de Janeiro and its favelas. Based on ethnographically inspired research carried out in 2009-2010, this article examines two examples of blog ‘framing content’ (a sidebar and a static page) encountered during fieldwork, which functioned to establish a concrete link between the posts on the blogs in question, their authors, and a named favela, even when the posts were not explicitly about that favela. At the same time, the framing content also made visible, and affirmed, the translocal connections between that favela, other favelas, and the city as a whole. These illustrative examples from a wider study show how favela bloggers are engaged in resignifying and remapping the relationships between different empirical scales of locality (and associated identities) in Rio de Janeiro, demonstrating the contribution an interdisciplinary approach to the digital texts and practices of favela residents can make to an understanding of the contemporary city and its representational conundrums, from the perspective of ‘ordinary practitioners’.

Keywords: Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, favelas, internet, blogs, digital culture, locality, place, representation

Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, the internet has become a key site for the portrayal of Rio de Janeiro's favelas, or shantytowns. The representational disputes surrounding these historically marginalised and stigmatised neighbourhoods have taken on a digital dimension, and incorporated a wider range of voices, through a diversity of content extending from established thematic websites about favelas, the precursors of this 'boom', to the independent production of favela residents, individually or collectively, on blogs, social network sites, and photograph and video-sharing sites. These latest developments, and the shift to multiple platforms and creators of content, reflect the striking popularity and intensive use of social media platforms in Brazilian digital culture as a whole (Fragoso 2006; Horst 2011).

This representational shift can thus be credited in part to rising access to the internet in Brazil as a whole, and specifically in Brazilian favelas and urban periphery areas,¹ which have seen the emergence of what has been called '*cultura popular digital*' ('digital popular culture'),² a term attributed to Hermano Vianna (Bentes 2007, 59). Key drivers of the growth have been public access initiatives such as telecentres (supported by different instances of government, private foundations and non-governmental organisations) and later *lan houses*, the informal, privately-run equivalent which have been particularly prominent, and popular, in urban periphery areas. More recently rising incomes and falling costs of hardware have contributed to increases in home-based computer and internet access by those lower down the socioeconomic scale (Olinto and Fragoso 2011). Although striking inequalities persist, and access to mobile and fixed telephony and the ownership of computers with internet connections continue to be significantly lower in Rio de Janeiro's large

¹ Despite the difficulties in accessing reliable data specifically on access in Rio's favelas, the assumption made here is that increases in those areas are likely to have matched increases in national averages, which have been particularly marked over the past decade. The only extensive survey of internet use in Rio's favelas, conducted in 2003 before much of the recent expansion in access and the configuration of contemporary Brazilian digital culture, found that 11.6% of favela residents used the internet, a figure close to the national average of the time (Sorj and Guedes 2005, 4-5, 9). Assuming that the same correlation has been maintained, we can draw on the national figures from 2010 to chart how access in favelas may have developed in later years. The national figure for 2010 was 41% (CETIC.br 2011a), whilst the figure for urban areas was 45% (CETIC.br 2011b). Based on their analysis of national data from a different source (the PNAD, or national household survey) for the period 2005-2008, Gilda Olinto and Suely Fragoso (2011) offer insights into who may have benefited from such increases. They analysed data from the PNAD (national household survey) for 2005-2008 and found that growth in access had been 'beneficial to those who usually lag behind in the process: it has favored older people, women, Afro-Brazilians and those at lower level of the educational ladder. Although the increase in internet access in the period studied was largest among the highest income group, it appears to have been particularly beneficial for those in lowest income strata' (Olinto and Fragoso 2011, 6).

² All translations from Portuguese to English are my own, unless otherwise stated.

favelas than in wealthy areas of the city (Quaino 2012), one recent study carried out in five Rio favelas found that 90% of young people under the age of 30 living in those areas used the internet and that social network sites, and particularly Facebook, were very important for sociability, dissemination of cultural production, networking, and access to information (Instituto Humanitas Unisinos 2013; Barbosa and Gonçalves Dias 2013, 121). Digital culture has thus become part of everyday life in Rio's favelas, for some, if not all, of the population.

Beyond these trends, the contemporary internet-based portrayal of favelas by their residents, and the motivations that drive it, must be understood in the context of what Lorraine Leu (2004, 347) and Beatriz Jaguaribe (2009, 220) have both termed a 'crisis' of representation affecting favelas and their residents, and their place in the city of Rio as a whole.³ In recent times, the mainstream media have tended to portray favelas primarily in terms of violence, crime, and poverty (Ramos and Paiva 2007), adopting a 'trope of war' (Leu 2004, 351). Favelas are often positioned as not being part of the city, which is understood in an idealised way (Souza e Silva and Barbosa 2005). For Leu, the abandonment, in the face of the urban violence of recent decades, of representational conventions and stereotypes based on an understanding of the urban popular classes as repositories of 'creative carnivalesque exuberance, dance and festivity' has led to 'a need to re-symbolize the popular subject' (2004, 348) in Rio de Janeiro. As this article discusses, digital communication has offered favela residents a means of engaging in these representational struggles.

Beyond the media, another frame of reference for the emergence of digital content about favelas has been the growth of mainstream cultural portrayals of favelas in contemporary works spanning music, cinema, and literature, which also manifest the competing and persistent stereotypes mentioned above. They provide equally compelling examples of the negative conceptualisation of favelas as the setting or source, *par excellence*, of urban violence (see Williams 2008; Peixoto 2007) and the more positively inflected view of 'the favela as cradle of sensuous rhythms (from samba to funk) and home of beautiful shining bodies' (Freire-Medeiros

³ For Leu (2004, 347-8), this crisis can be understood partly as a response to Lefebvrian 'spatial practices' through which residents of favelas have asserted their visibility in public spaces of the city (she cites the examples of the 1992 *arrastões*, or the attacks on Rio landmarks by drug traffickers in 2003) in a way that explicitly challenges historically embedded socio-spatial divides and hierarchies.

2011, 30). However, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movements in Rio have been active over the last ten to fifteen years to work against these biases and offer more realistic and diverse representations of favelas, including on the internet (Gomes da Cunha 2007; Ramalho 2007). Notably, as well as generating institutional outputs, many NGOs have become involved in running projects designed to train favela residents to produce and circulate their own digital media and audiovisual productions.

If these mainstream and institutional undertakings have contributed to an expansion in the social and cultural visibility of the Brazilian urban periphery, that visibility has also been generated through the efforts of individual residents, who will be the focus of the discussion here. A significant number have become engaged in 'try[ing] to appropriate the mechanisms of producing their own representations of themselves and the world', for example, by writing books, writing or performing music, and participating in the NGO workshops mentioned above (Hamburger 2008, 201-202).⁴ As Ivana Bentes (2007, 55) has suggested, these new 'subjects of discourse' from the periphery produce not only culture, but also a critical discourse on racism, police violence, and poverty to rival that of academics and the media. One key feature of this discourse has been the 'affirmation' of favela territories in social projects and cultural production (Ramos 2007), combating stigmatisation by explicitly naming such neighbourhoods in, for example, song lyrics, literary texts, and clothing (Ramos 2007; Carvalho Lopes 2009; Peçanha do Nascimento 2009).

This article focuses specifically on blogging by favela residents as a variant of the self-representational trend outlined above, arguing that digital culture constitutes a vital, and as yet not systematically explored, arena of research on the representation of Rio de Janeiro and its favelas. However, it is also one that also requires cultural studies scholars to think in new ways about their objects of study and the stance to be taken towards them, due to the questions that digital content provokes about authorship, textuality, and circulation, as well as research ethics. The ethnographically inspired fieldwork which formed the basis for this article was undertaken over

⁴ Beatriz Jaguaribe offers a more measured interpretation of this trend. Acknowledging that new forms of 'favela authorship' are 'empowering', she nonetheless cautions that such manifestations 'can also be limiting to the extent that authorship becomes conditioned by cultural traits, territorial belonging, and symbolic identities' (Jaguaribe 2014, 197).

thirteen months in 2009-2010 from a base in Rio de Janeiro, and employed a range of methods including systematic observation of content (Androutsopoulos 2008), participant observation and interviews (via the internet and face-to-face), and textual and visual analysis of content.⁵ The content observation process involved monitoring blogs and other internet platforms via regular visits and automatic content feeds, recording and capturing new content and design features via a research diary and screenshots, following links within content and tracking its circulation across websites and platforms, and reacting to and pursuing potential connections and trajectories, whether digital or physical/embodied, arising in the content. Although I did not blog myself, I engaged in a process of close and active ‘listening’ (Crawford 2009) to relevant content. The overall fieldwork process was thus understood as one of ‘following the content’, adapting the central principle of George Marcus’s (1995) ‘multi-sited ethnography’ to a dynamic, mobile and mutable research object understood as encompassing both texts and practices, with the texts themselves also inviting detailed analysis.

The bloggers who participated in the study were based in the Complexo da Maré in northern Rio de Janeiro, a particularly visible favela cluster not only for its geographical location and its reputation as a poor area with high levels of violence, but also for its pioneering local initiatives seeking to revert the stereotypes surrounding favelas, as will be discussed in more detail below. The research began as a study of the production and dissemination of ‘local content’ by Brazilian favela residents on the internet,⁶ outside of the scope of institutionally-supported projects. Although blogs ultimately became the core focus of the study, early exploratory (but not exhaustive) mapping of digital content from Maré found a variety of different types of ‘local content’ being published on

⁵ The decision to term this approach ‘ethnographically inspired’ reflects its observation of some of the key principles of ethnography – methodological reflexivity and adaptiveness, and an effort to achieve ‘alignment’ with the perspectives of the people being studied (Horst and Miller 2006, 167) as well as exposure to, and experience of, their practices (Eichhorn 2001; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The terminological caveat (‘ethnographically *inspired*’) acknowledges the central influence which ethnographic studies of the internet and digital technologies (Hine 2000; Miller and Slater 2000; Postill 2008, 2011), literacy practices (Barton and Hamilton 1998) and writing/texts (Barber 2007; Blommaert 2008; Barton and Papen 2010) had on the research design, but also the methodological displacements which occur when ethnography is applied in an interdisciplinary and digital project such as this one. These displacements can include a shift away from necessarily long-term immersion and participant observation in a specific bounded location, which one reaches through physical travel, to be replaced by a ‘partial’ (rather than ‘holistic’) view of the object of study (Hine 2000, 10), and an understanding of the fieldsite as a network incorporating a variety of spaces, physical and otherwise (Burrell 2009; Strauss 2000), in which different types of (co)-presence and interaction are achieved (Marcus 1995; Beaulieu 2010).

⁶ Local content is ‘the expression of the locally owned and adapted knowledge of a community – where the community is defined by its location, culture, language, or area of interest’ (Ballantyne 2002, 2).

different internet platforms by individuals, groups and organisations based in the area. These ranged from institutional websites (for NGOs and local media initiatives), to blogs set up by individual residents as well as local cultural and social projects/groups (sometimes using blogging software as the basis for a more static website) and a large range of place-based profiles and communities (or groups) on the now-defunct social network site Orkut,⁷ some relating more generically to the neighbourhood and its sub-areas, and others to specific leisure spaces and activities in the area as well as local businesses and social, cultural, educational, sports, and media initiatives.

Blogs were chosen as the main focus of the study for the self-reflexive representations of place they put forward, and the way bloggers engaged with and offered alternatives to portrayals of favelas in mainstream media and cultural production, in contrast to content observed elsewhere which simply related local information, announced local cultural events, or presented ‘conversations about the everyday problems and experiences’ (Walker & Wehner 2009: 6) of the neighbourhood. However, the intersection with Orkut and other web platforms remained important throughout the study, reflecting bloggers’ use of a range of channels to disseminate and publicise their blog content, including email and print publications. Overall, three detailed case studies of the work of individual bloggers were developed, each with a different angle on ‘local content’; this article presents a snapshot of the research via selected extracts from two of those case studies, which serve to illustrate the overall findings. The first case study, not drawn on here,⁸ was oriented around a single blog post (including both text and an image), presenting a resident’s personal response to a period of conflict in one of Maré’s sub-areas, which was published on a group blog (without a geographical orientation) and went on to be widely reposted on other blogs and websites as well as being disseminated on social network sites, email and in print. The second case study, from which the sidebar example below is taken, centred on the literary self-publication activities, online and in print, of a Maré resident who was involved in promoting not just her own work, but also that of other residents of favelas and the urban periphery. Finally, the third case study, the

⁷ At the time of the fieldwork, Orkut was the most popular social network site in Brazil. Today, one would look for such content on Facebook.

⁸ See Holmes 2012 for a discussion based on this case study.

source of the second example discussed in this article, looked at a relatively long-standing blog authored by a Maré resident with a strong visual component, considering its evolution as a medium for publishing representations of the favela, as well as specific thematic series or clusters of content relating to place. Although the starting point for the illustrative extracts provided here is blog content, its analysis and interpretation is informed by the fieldwork interactions with the bloggers in question and the overall body of data collected in the wider study.

Recalling the territorial affirmation of favelas in social projects and cultural production mentioned above, I found that all of the bloggers I followed were involved in different practices to explicitly tie their content to a specific geographical location. This digital affirmation of the favela is presented here as a form of territorial embeddedness, borrowing a term from economic geography. For Hess (2004), there are three major manifestations of embeddedness – societal, network and territorial –, with territorial embeddedness referring to ‘the extent to which an actor is anchored in particular territories or places’ (Hess 2004, 177). In my use of the concept, the anchoring is applied to the content in the first instance, rather than to the bloggers, although the distinction between ‘content’ and ‘people’ proved hard to maintain in fieldwork, as I have discussed elsewhere (Holmes 2013). Practices of territorial embedding identified in the research included textual and visual referencing of place in content, use of localised language (although language designed to be accessible to a non-local audience was also used where deemed necessary), the dissemination of blog content using particular channels or sites (such as place-oriented groups on social network sites) and the targeting of particular audiences.

This article will discuss territorial embeddedness in two examples of ‘framing content’ taken from the blogs followed in the fieldwork. Blog ‘framing content’, a type of digital ‘paratext’ (Gray 2008),⁹ can also be understood as a variant of Lauren Berlant’s (1997, 12) ‘waste materials of everyday communication’. In other words, it is an often-overlooked type of media or cultural material, which invites interdisciplinary and critical engagement within area studies, where it can be

⁹ Moody (2008, 103) has noted the analytical potential and significance of a whole ‘variety of other texts surrounding [blog] post[s]: banners, taglines, side-bars, footers, blogrolls, links, and a host of other blog elements’, and other scholars have identified sidebars as a key site of customisation in blogs (Scheidt and Wright 2004).

placed ‘in dialogue with other cultural texts’ (Sturken 2012, 359). The examples discussed here, which show the potential of focusing on this type of content in digital culture research, are a section of the sidebar of a literary blog (composed of photographs, extracts from song lyrics, and custom headings), and an informational text on a static page of a blog originally set up to post photographs.

In both cases, the framing content functioned to establish a concrete link between the posts on the blogs, their authors, and a named favela, Complexo da Maré, even when the posts were not explicitly about Maré. At the same time, however, I will show that despite the territorial embeddedness it conveyed, the framing content constructed by the bloggers also made visible, and affirmed, the connections between Maré, other favelas, and the city as a whole, thereby drawing attention to the translocality (Appadurai 1996; Gielis 2009) of these locations and the identities tied to them. As I argue, this framing content can thus be understood as an exercise in resignifying and remapping the relationships between different empirical scales of locality (and associated identities) in the city of Rio de Janeiro. It reveals how digital content is being used by some favela residents in Rio de Janeiro to engage in the production of a differential meaning and visibility for favelas and their residents, and their relationship to the city. In this way, the article demonstrates the contribution an interdisciplinary approach to the digital texts and practices of favela residents can make to an understanding of the contemporary city and its representational conundrums, from the perspective of ‘ordinary practitioners’ (de Certeau 1984).

The importance of place in digital culture

The foregrounding of geographical place by the bloggers substantiates a growing body of academic work showing that place continues to be an important reference for people when using the internet and digital technologies and creating digital content (Srinivasan and Fish 2009; Reed 2008; Haythornthwaite and Kendall 2010; Kang 2009; Uimonen 2009; Taylor and Pitman 2012). This belies early claims that the internet would result in so-called ‘disembedding’ (Giddens 2005 [1991]) and diminish the importance of place, giving way instead to flows (Castells 2000). As Eric Gordon

and Gene Koo (2008, 208) assert, ‘the rise of networks does not, in fact, signal the fall of places. It turns out that the very stuff of society is not the space of flows. [...] In other words, a networked society can both encourage flows and reinforce places’. The practices involved in using digital technologies thus constitute one arena in which ideas of place and locality are being reworked.

As well as the contemporary Brazilian sociocultural context, this reading of digital representations of favelas is therefore informed by fluid and networked understandings of place and (network) locality that have emerged in different disciplines in response to wider social changes, including, but not limited to, the growth of digital culture. These theories acknowledge that places have plural meanings and are connected to other places in a multitude of ways (Massey 1994; Escobar 2001), and that locality may be produced not only in geographical locations, as traditionally thought, but also by people in dispersed locations who come together, with the help of digital technologies, around shared concerns or interests (Appadurai 1996; Ito 1999). Critical consensus is that geography and technology have become intertwined in contemporary understandings and practices of (network) locality (Ito 1999; Gordon 2008; Gordon and Koo 2008, 209). At the same time, research has shown that the so-called ‘online’ and ‘offline’ are not inherently separate or distinct dimensions, contexts or spaces, but should rather be seen as potentially intersecting and configuring each other in a multitude of complex ways, ways which can themselves be fruitful objects of study (Miller and Slater 2000, 2004; Hine 2000; Slater 2002; Leander and McKim 2003; Crang, Crosbie and Graham 2007).

Particularly relevant for a consideration of the representation of favelas by their residents is Appadurai's understanding of locality as process (rather than inherent characteristic), and ‘structure of feeling’ not necessarily attached to physical place (Appadurai 1996, 189, 198; 2002, 34). Appadurai emphasises the subjectivity and agency of different actors with different agendas and social positions in this process, and the potential this creates for the emergence of struggles (Appadurai 1996, 189). A similar point is made by Doreen Massey (1994, 153) when discussing how the diversity of possible identities and meanings associated with particular places can be ‘a

source of richness or a source of conflict, or both'. If conflicts are an inherent feature of how favelas are understood and represented (Oosterbaan 2009, 97-98 n1), both in Brazil and beyond, digital culture allows favela residents to convey 'their sense of home' (Jaguaribe 2014, 8), to reposition favelas as lived neighbourhoods. As the blog framing content selected here shows, this is a way of asserting their 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996 cited in Holston 2009, 247-248).

For Appadurai, the imagination is therefore another crucial force in everyday practices of the production of locality, which 'allows people to inhabit either multiple localities or a kind of single and complex sense of locality, in which many different empirical scales coexist' (Appadurai 2002, 43). In describing this multiplicity he also uses the related term 'translocality', usefully glossed by Gielis as how 'people can experience many places (and accompanying social networks) within one place' (Gielis 2009, 275). Whilst often referring implicitly or explicitly to transnational flows and connections, particularly in the context of migration, translocality can also be used, as suggested by this article, to encompass relationships between, or connections to, different areas of the same country or city. With this context in mind, the production and dissemination of digital content about favelas was approached in this study not just as the representation of place, but also as a technique for the production of locality (Appadurai 1996, 2002), an area of practice in which content creators imagined, expressed, and shaped the literal and symbolic meanings of their neighbourhood, both as physical place and place in the imaginary of the city.

Introducing Complexo da Maré

The neighbourhood in question, Complexo da Maré, is situated in northern Rio de Janeiro. It borders Guanabara Bay and three important expressways (the Avenida Brasil, the Linha Vermelha and the Linha Amarela), as well as being close to the international airport and the Fundão campus of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Historically, Maré has been known for its *palafitas* (houses built on stilts over water), and this, together with the visibility of its location, has contributed to a widespread perception of Maré as a poor area (Silva 2002, 15). Today its visibility

is also associated with public security issues, making it one of the most stigmatised favelas in the city (Souza e Silva et al 2009, 11). Home to a military police batallion (since 2003), as well as militias and different drug factions, areas of Maré's territory can be the subject of tense disputes.¹⁰ The nature of its visibility is also reflected in Maré's appearance in popular culture. As will be discussed below, the area features in the 1986 song 'Alagados' by the band Paralamas do Sucesso. More recently, the film *Maré, nossa história de amor* (Lúcia Murat, 2007), was set in the area and is described as a '[f]ree adaptation of the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet translated to the harsh life in Favela da Maré, one of the largest and most violent slums in Rio de Janeiro' (IMDb n.d.), in a blurb reinforcing the negative visibility of Maré.

Maré was officially recognised as a formal neighbourhood, or '*bairro*', in 1994, and is made up of 16 different communities. The first residents arrived in the area known as Morro do Timbau in the 1940s. The ongoing occupation of the area was influenced by the opening of the Avenida Brasil in the mid-1940s (accompanied by the development of industry), the state government policy of favela eradication in the 1960s (when residents evicted from favelas in southern Rio were transferred to Maré), as well as Brazil's rural to urban migration of the second half of the twentieth century, notably that from the north-east of the country (Alvito 2001, 273). The area's *palafitas* were eradicated by the Projeto Rio favela urbanisation initiative at the end of the 1970s (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2003, 16; Perlman 2010, 272), but a reconstruction of one such dwelling can still be seen at the Museu da Maré, one of only a handful of museums located within Rio's favelas.

Figures from 2001, from the local census conducted by the NGO CEASM, showed that 132,000 people were living in the Complexo da Maré at that time (Silva 2002), making it one of the largest favela clusters in Rio.¹¹ There is vibrant commercial activity in the area, with a weekly street market as well as a range of shops and businesses, and the legacy of north-eastern migration is reflected both in this commerce and in social and cultural activities. Significantly, Maré has also

¹⁰ Since April 2014, Maré has been occupied by the Brazilian armed forces and military police in preparation for its 'pacification'.

¹¹ Maré is the only favela to have conducted its own census. A second edition of the census was conducted in 2010 and 2011, coordinated by local NGO Redes de Desenvolvimento da Maré in partnership with the Observatório de Favelas. Outputs from the initiative have so far included a street map of Maré and a survey of local commerce (Redes de Desenvolvimento da Maré and Observatório de Favelas 2014).

given rise to influential NGOs with an interest in the representation of favelas, and the place of favelas in the city, notably the Observatório de Favelas and Redes de Desenvolvimento da Maré, as well as CEASM mentioned above. A community television station (considered to be one of the first in the city), TV Maré, was set up in 1989, and a radio station, Radio Maré, was established in 1995 (Pandolfi and Grynszpan 2003: 16). Today, the area has two community newspapers, both set up by NGOs. There are also at least two *pré-vestibular* (university preparation) courses run by NGOs in Maré, and both of the bloggers whose work is discussed in this article were students at public universities at the time of the research. Although the bloggers were approached as independent content creators in the study, this institutional context formed part of the backdrop to their production.

Looking to the margins: Reclaiming the city and repositioning the favela in a blog sidebar

The first example of framing content is a blog sidebar, which originated in the literary blog of a writer, mature student, teacher and mother (referred to here by the initial 'A.'). She described herself to me, in our first contact on email, as an enthusiastic resident of the Complexo da Maré. Her strong interest in producing and supporting self-representations about Maré and similar areas to counter perceived gaps in those generated by outsiders was evident not just in her blog, but also in her involvement in and promotion of various activities linked to literary production in favelas and the urban periphery. These included writing competitions, self-publication, and a presence on social network sites (as well as on several other blogs besides her literary blog).

At the time of my research A.'s literary blog was constantly undergoing transformations, as she acknowledged in her own introductory page on the blog, commenting on how she 'change(d) its clothes' from time to time. This affirmation echoes Badger's assertion that '[i]f we think of weblogs as being "homepage[s] that we wear", then it is the visual elements that tailor the garment to fit the individual' (2004, n.p. citing Coates 2003). As well as variations in the blog template, or design (at least six different templates were used, for varying lengths of time, during my fieldwork) the

content published in the sidebar of A.'s writing blog also changed and developed over the course of the research, demonstrating that the blog itself – as a platform for self-publication – constituted a work in progress, and was never static or finished. To employ Chandler's argument about homepages (an earlier form of digital self-publishing), the customisation of blogs by their users can be considered a form of bricolage, in which 'one may reselect and rearrange elements until a pattern emerges which seems to satisfy the constraints of the task and the current purposes of the user' (Chandler 1998 cited in Deuze 2006, 70).¹²

In early 2009, when I first came into contact with A.'s blog, its right-hand sidebar included content which clearly affirmed its author as a resident of a named favela, and pointed to her investment in generating her own representations of that favela. Profile information expressed pride in living in Maré and the desire to use the blog and the texts published there to counter stereotypes associated with that favela and with favelas as a whole, as well as an affirmation of the cultural capital of the favela. These characteristics of A.'s digital production (as well as other publishing and curation activities), and the intentions behind them, were reinforced in other fieldwork observations and interactions, including an interview.

The sidebar extract itself, although a discrete block of content, was divided into two parts, each comprising a custom header, an image and song lyrics.¹³ The top section was headed '*Minha cidade maravilhosa*' ['My wonderful city'], in a reference to Rio de Janeiro's nickname, employed in official promotion and branding of the city but also used both affectionately and ironically by residents and visitors alike. The use of the possessive adjective 'my' is significant for the ownership and belonging it expresses. The accompanying image showed an idyllic and widely-disseminated

¹² Another angle on the mutability and openness of blogs is that some scholars have warned of the methodological implications of detaching posts from blogs and their dynamic publication context. This creates the risk of a 'desituating' effect (Viégas 2005, n.p.) due to isolating the posts from changes and expansions in content initiated by the original blogger as well as by links created by readers/users on other blogs and digital platforms (Himmer 2004). Here I have gone even further and detached an element of a sidebar from a blog and the posts it framed. However, like Victoria Carrington in her analysis of blog and social network site screenshots, despite their static nature, I find such 'textual artefacts [...] compelling' (Carrington 2009, 7), and provide an analysis which attempts to maintain their situatedness.

¹³ During the course of my research on this blog, its sidebar (or sometimes its footer) also included some or all of the following images: a photograph of the blog's author; a slideshow widget presenting a selection of photographs of different activities associated with her literary activities (such as launch events); photographs of well-known literary and cultural figures, both Brazilian and foreign, accompanied by quotation from their work; thumbnail pictures of those 'following' the blog via Google Blogger; and badges (with links) for other literature-oriented sites or social network sites, both Brazilian and international, where A. published work or had a presence.

photograph of Rio de Janeiro: illuminated at night, as seen from the top of the Christ the Redeemer statue, looking down on the Sugar Loaf hill in the middle of Guanabara Bay and the middle-class neighbourhoods located on the bay's edge. This postcard-like image¹⁴ was followed by the opening verses of Fernanda Abreu's 1992 song 'Rio 40 Graus',¹⁵ which draw attention to the contradictions inherent in this packaging of the city, and in particular the urban corruption and violence which it overlooks:

Fernanda Abreu is a singer from a middle-class background known for blending different musical styles, with a particularly keen interest in *funk carioca* from Rio's favelas and suburbs (Moehn 2012, 132, 137, 164). In a release for Abreu's 2000 album *Entidade Urbana* [*Urban Entity*], Hermano Vianna (2000), the Rio-based anthropologist and cultural producer, notes that the song 'Rio 40 graus' almost beat world-famous bossa nova songs and a Rio carnival standard in a people's poll to choose the song which best represented the city.¹⁶ Ethnomusicologist Frederick Moehn (2012, 149) has commented that the song's

lyrics and musical sound [...] offer a poetic rendering of a street-level mixture of music, technology, sensuality, violence, informal economies, North American black music, hints of samba, the beach, traffickers, and the police – in short, Brazil's hot capital of beauty and chaos.

Despite Moehn's acknowledgement that Abreu's standpoint on the city may remain informed by her middle-class background, I argue that as employed in this blog sidebar, 'Rio 40 Graus' can be considered an informal or alternative anthem for the city, one which engages with its complexity rather than celebrating its stereotypes. Indeed, George Yúdice (2004, 113) has interpreted the song's lyrics as heralding a 'new urban landscape', one in which young cultural producers from the city's favelas are claiming urban space 'as their own'. He sees the song as the articulation of a new identity characterised by '*the affirmation of local citizenship*' over national identity (Yúdice 2004,

¹⁴ As Jaguaribe and Hetherington (2004, 155) note, 'Rio can lay claim to fame as one of the most celebrated spaces in the global imaginary of tourist pleasure sites. The beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, the dramatic landscape into which a modernist city appears to have grown as abundantly as the tropical vegetation, the Art Deco *Christ the Redeemer* statue on Corcovado mountain that looks out over the city, samba dancing, night life, and especially Carnival, are all used to signify Rio as a desirable tourist place to play'.

¹⁵ Lyrics by Fernanda Abreu, Fausto Fawcett and Carlos Laufer. The song was released in 1992. Note that *Rio 40°* is also the title of a classic 1954 film by Brazilian director Nelson Pereira dos Santos, whose main characters are favela residents.

¹⁶ Vianna does not provide further details of the poll, such as when it took place or who organised it.

114; emphasis in original). In the sidebar, the extract from the song's lyrics employed by the blogger (in combination with those of another song) serve to affirm her ownership of urban space, and to insert her local area within that urban space on equal terms.

Prefaced by the heading '*Meu universo – Favela da Maré*' ['My universe – The Maré favela'] which repeats the possessive adjective discussed above, the lower section of the sidebar, located immediately below the section already discussed and joined to it, incorporated a photograph providing a street-level view of what appears to be part of Maré. The image showed people walking and cycling in a commercial area, with shop displays, signs, and parked cars visible along the edges of the street. In the foreground, at the top of the photograph, cables and wires appear strung along the sides of the street and across it, and a hand-painted advertising banner can be seen, of the kind widely used in favelas to announce cultural and social events. The background is dominated by low-rise buildings, with washing and water storage tanks visible on their roofs. In other words, the photograph presents an everyday scene in the favela, which I have seen for myself when I have visited the area.¹⁷ The lyrics that follow come from the song 'Alagados' on the 1986 album *Selvagem?* [Wild?] by the band Paralamas do Sucesso,¹⁸ which name-checks Maré alongside other (in)famous shantytowns in Brazil and Jamaica (Alagados itself is the name of a favela in the north-eastern Brazilian city of Salvador). 'Alagados' appeared as number 63 in a feature on the 100 greatest Brazilian songs in the Brazilian edition of *Rolling Stone* magazine in October 2009, where it was described as 'a hymn for the oppressed classes, but with irresistible pop appeal' (Miyazawa 2009).

The juxtaposition of the cliché version of Rio with the city's more complex reality, as expressed in 'Rio 40 graus', is repeated here in the excerpt from the second song. A contrast is established between the welcoming open arms of the Christ the Redeemer statue, the symbol by which Rio is globally recognised, and the '*punhos fechados*' ['closed fists'] which, according to the

¹⁷ I searched for the photo using the name of the favela in Google Images and also found the same image used in a piece on a journalist's blog in January 2010 illustrating a story about a shoot-out between the police and drug traffickers in Maré. No additional information (e.g. who took it, when it was taken, what it shows) is provided about the photograph in any of these postings.

¹⁸ Lyrics by Herbert Vianna, Bi Ribeiro and João Barone.

lyrics, often characterise interactions in the city in real life. Alongside the localised reference to Maré, the lyrics of ‘Alagados’ also draw attention to the commonalities between shantytowns in different parts of Brazil and abroad, especially in the phrase ‘*Filhos da mesma agonia*’ [‘Children of the same affliction’]. In this respect, the lyrics raise the issue of what A. conceptualises as the shared vision of the periphery, or from the margins, which is a strong feature of her activities on the internet and in print, albeit with an awareness of the diverse urban periphery contexts that exist.

The use of the image and song lyrics relating to Maré in the blog’s framing text underneath the block of content about Rio serves to position the favela firmly in the geographical, social and cultural landscape of the city, rather than as a space representing the opposite or antithesis of the city. It points to the complexity and, at the same time, the compatibility of the relationships between different urban spaces and identities (i.e. the feeling of belonging to both the city and a particular favela), recalling Appadurai’s (2002) discussion of the multiple empirical scales of locality that individuals may experience. Furthermore, the two perspectives on the city presented in the photographs, from above and from the streets, also bring to mind Michel de Certeau’s (1984) discussion of the voyeuristic and distancing ‘panorama-city’ (exemplified by the view from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre in New York, or Medieval and Renaissance paintings which presented an imagined vision of the city), and the city as experienced by ‘ordinary practitioners’, on foot. As he writes, ‘[t]he panorama-city is a “theoretical” (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices’ (de Certeau 1984, 93). Ordinary people, on the other hand, write the city through their everyday practices of mobility.

To illustrate the potential of bringing this type of digital material into dialogue with other cultural texts, as suggested by Sturken (2012, 359) in her discussion of Lauren Berlant’s work, we can consider the relevance not just of the song lyrics referenced in the sidebar and discussed above, but also mainstream film representations of the city. In her discussion of the opening sequence of the Brazilian documentary *Ônibus 174* (José Padilha, 2002), Leu (2008, 177) draws attention to a

similar contrast between ‘the visible, coherent and legible city’, or ‘the rational city seen from above’, and the more complex reality of Rio de Janeiro, with its many spaces that have escaped the ‘rationalising impetus’ (178) of successive urban renewal efforts in the city since the early 20th century. The film begins with an aerial shot of Rio’s famous landscape before the camera settles at street level to explore ‘a deathscape that highlights the relationship between subaltern groups and space in the city’ (Leu 2008, 184), in this case the hijacking of a bus on a busy street in Rio’s affluent South Zone by a former street child in June 2000. In the blog sidebar under discussion here, the view from the streets is presented more affirmatively, but the juxtaposition of the visible city and one of its more invisible, or negatively visible, spaces through material employed by A. parallels Leu’s discussion and the recognition of a process of engaging with and revealing complexity, this time directly by a favela resident.

The framing content combines representations of urban space from mainstream Brazilian popular music, photographs sourced from the web, and A.’s own customisation of the blog format through the addition of the titles described above in what can be understood as a type of bricolage, as suggested earlier. For Mark Deuze (2006, 66), alongside participation and remediation, bricolage is a principal component of digital culture, and refers to how users ‘reflexively assemble [their] own particular versions of [...] reality’. In the sidebar content I have analysed, we see A. using and customising a digital media platform to assemble a version of reality that reflects the plural and overlapping forms of locality she imagines and experiences in her everyday practices. In other words, the digital bricolage of the blog sidebar reflects an attempt at affirmative urban bricolage, an alteration of conventional representations of urban space.

Blogging the city, contextualising the favela

My second example of ‘framing content’ is taken from a blog established in 2007 by another resident of Maré. V., as I will call him, migrated in his teens from a small village in the north-east of Brazil, and was a photographer and university student at the time of the fieldwork. He first set up

his blog with the aim of using it to post photographs, since the social network site Orkut, popular at the time, did not offer all the functionality and storage space he sought. Photographs, mainly taken by V. himself (he also sometimes posted those taken by friends and colleagues) were a key feature of the blog at the time of the research, appearing in the custom blog header, in its sidebar, and with frequency in blog posts themselves. Indeed, posts on this blog were often made up only of one or more photographs, accompanied by very brief textual captions. Nonetheless, V. acknowledged in an interview that from the outset, the blog also carried other types of content (such as texts, news, poetry, *crônicas*, and articles).

Although V.'s blog can be understood on one level as a personal blog/website which provides some information about its author and his activities, it has since its inception been explicitly oriented and constructed around place, and over time has become a site for the publication of multimedia local content, around which a distributed communicative circuit has been established. While this research was being undertaken in 2009-2010, V.'s blog published or displayed content which was also stored on a Google Picasa photograph album, and a YouTube video channel. He used Orkut and Twitter to publicise blog posts to different audiences, as well as an email list subdivided into different categories of people depending on their interests. He received feedback on his posts via these varied channels as well as through face-to-face interactions with friends.

Similarly to A.'s blog, V.'s blog periodically underwent design alterations and changes, both ongoing minor adjustments and more major upgrades. This mutability was directly acknowledged in a descriptive text published on the blog, which stated that the blog *'inevitavelmente transforma-se com a mesma rotina e intensidade que o próprio cotidiano'* [*'inevitably transforms itself with the same routine and intensity as everyday life itself'*]. In the connection established by V. between the blog's ongoing development and the rhythms of everyday life, there are echoes of comments made by a participant in Adam Reed's study of London bloggers (2008). She drew a parallel between the open-endedness of blogs and life in the city, describing

herself as ‘being a “work in progress”, someone who (like the city) is constantly evolving or “updating” in response to changing circumstances and the stimuli she daily receives’ (Reed 2008, 401). Overall, Reed (2008, 391) observed that his research into blogging in London was fundamentally about how London bloggers ‘constitute[d] their city’. The bloggers from Complexo da Maré discussed here were also engaging in constituting their city, but their first step was to constitute their neighbourhood and make it visible in a way that went beyond the mainstream representations that stigmatised it, reflecting the sociocultural specificities of their urban context.

The first ever post on V.’s blog was about culture in Maré, as he later recalled in a text marking the blog’s three-year anniversary, showing that from the outset the blog’s content was strongly embedded in a particular local setting. That embeddedness is also clearly stated in a descriptive text available on one of the blog’s static pages during fieldwork, which will be the main focus of the analysis here, with occasional reference to other blog content. On that page, V. explained that while the blog’s current focus was everyday life in the city of Rio de Janeiro, its ‘*lugar real*’, or ‘real place’, was the Maré favela cluster. This is a more direct and explicit anchoring of the blog’s content in a geographical location than that seen in the sidebar discussed above, and here the words used are the blogger’s own, rather than those of well-known songs in the popular culture forms repurposed by A.

V.’s affirmation of the blog’s territorial embeddedness was accompanied by factual background about Maré, presented in a simple and straightforward manner that suggested it was directed, at least in part, at readers who might not be aware of key features of the neighbourhood and its geographical location:

A Maré é formada por 16 comunidades com um total de 140 mil habitantes distribuídos em quase 5 quilômetros quadrados. O bairro Maré é emoldurado pela Avenida Brasil, Linha Vermelha e Linha Amarela, principais vias da cidade do Rio de Janeiro. [Maré is made up of 16 communities with a total of 140 thousand inhabitants spread over almost 5 square kilometres. The neighbourhood of Maré is framed by Avenida Brasil, the Linha Vermelha and the Linha Amarela, which are major roads in the city of Rio de Janeiro.]

However, this can also be understood as a more neutral description of Maré, without recourse to the sensationalist labels and references to crime and violence which are common in descriptions of the area by the mainstream media, or by mainstream cultural producers, such as the synopsis of the film *Maré, nossa história de amor* quoted above.

The concern with contextualisation which is apparent in this static blog page was also present elsewhere on V.'s blog, for example in a post about a local carnival band (*bloco*), in which he took pains to explain the *bloco*'s origins and embeddedness in what he called the 'diverse and complex' context of the favela. It was presented both as a cultural activity local to the area, of the type overlooked in negative media representations of the favela, and as an activist practice inspired by specific local challenges (in this case, restricted mobility between different parts of the favela due to the presence of different drug factions). V. was keenly aware of the challenges of posting content about local events on a blog with a local and non-local readership, and the adjustments that might be required to the framing of that content as a result, telling me:

é uma coisa local, [...] mas quando tá na rede, é mundial, então acho que às vezes até me força a tentar escrever na verdade não de forma muito local, por mais que o assunto seja de interesse local [it's a local thing, [...] but when it's on the web, it's global, so I think that this sometimes even forces me to try to write actually in not a very local way, even if the subject is of local interest].

Drawing on work by the sociolinguist Jan Blommaert (2008, 6; emphasis in original), this comment illustrates how some of the content on V.'s blog was 'written *for* globalisation, with the explicit purpose of being read by people from outside the community of [its composer]'. Aware of a range of potential audiences for the blog, with different levels of prior knowledge of Maré, V. seized the opportunity to put forward his own understanding of his neighbourhood.

Despite its explicit localisation of the blog content, however, the framing content on V.'s blog page mirrored A.'s in also evidencing a more 'geographically flexible' form of embeddedness, similar to that identified by Bosco (2006, 359; emphasis removed) in his work on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. This was a movement which began in a very specific place in the city of Buenos Aires but evolved to embrace a diversity of sites across the country. In his text, V. noted that with

the passing of time, the focus of the blog had shifted and expanded beyond a single neighbourhood, incorporating multiple locations and different scales of locality:

com o tempo o espaço se ampliou, passou a comportar assuntos mais gerais e de interesses não só da Maré. Atualmente aborda assuntos da cidade do Rio como um todo, em especial questões envolvendo as favelas, diretamente ou indiretamente. [with time the focus of the space expanded, and began to include more general subjects and those not only of relevance to Maré. It currently covers matters relating to the city of Rio as a whole, and especially issues involving favelas, directly or indirectly.]

The factual vein of the text continued, as seen below:

A favela é aqui entendida como:

- 1. espaço transpassado pela existência do belo, do feio, do triste, da alegria, do curioso, do bom, do injusto, do violento e do violentado.*
- 2. espaço fruto de gritantes contradições históricas não resolvidas.*
- 3. parte integrante e essencial da cidade.*

[The favela is understood here as:

1. a space criss-crossed by the beautiful, the ugly, the happy, the curious, the good, the unjust, the violent and the violated.
2. a space which is the consequence of striking unresolved historical contradictions.
3. an integral and essential part of the city.]

This section of the text revealed an awareness of the charged context of favela representation and the complexity and diversity of favelas themselves. It also set out, explicitly, the blogger's view that favelas should be considered part of the city. If this idea was stated in theoretical terms in the framing content, it was also apparent in the everyday practice of the blog, in the connections established between different places in the city in the content published. A series of mobile phone photographs of the city published on the blog over a period of time, for example, reflected the city as experienced by one of de Certeau's 'ordinary practitioners', on foot (or occasionally on public transport) and at street level, showing how disparate locations and localities were linked in the everyday trajectories of one individual.

While place remained central to the focus of the blog, then, the local was no longer restricted to locality in the conventional sense of a single, bounded, geographical location but was rather a shifting and mobile undertaking. The role of the framing content, this time a static page

rather than a sidebar, was to foreground the blogger's understanding of his neighbourhood and city, and assert his ownership of both. Despite an 'outwards' and translocal movement in the geographical and thematic scope of V.'s blog, which expanded from its original emphasis on visual representations of a particular neighbourhood, to a focus, at the time of my fieldwork, on multimedia content about favelas in the plural, and everyday life in the city as a whole, the content remained explicitly territorially embedded in Maré. As in the case of A., the framing content can thus be understood as an affirmation of the blogger's place of content creation, and an attempt to resignify Maré's place in the urban imaginary.

Conclusion

This discussion of two examples of blog framing content, taken from a larger study, has shown how bloggers from a Rio de Janeiro favela made use of both textual and visual elements to foreground and resignify their geographical origins, and that of their content, as favela residents, in areas that might on first impression be considered less worthy of analysis, alongside the regular flow of blog posts. Nonetheless, it was in this framing content that bloggers explicitly positioned their favela, and themselves, as a rightful part of the city, challenging views to the contrary. Although revealing a striking degree of territorial embeddedness, the framing content also made reference to the interlinkages and connections between places and between place-based identities. This inclusive stance on place can be understood as an attempt by the bloggers to combat exclusionary and marginalising perspectives on favelas – those which suggest that favelas are in some way not part of the city – by asserting the opposite.

In this way, by evidencing both territorial affirmation and translocality, the sidebar and the static blog page can be understood as a concrete realisation of Jaguaribe and Hetherington's (2004, 165) account of what happens in the encounter between representations of the city and of the favela, and how these can result in 'shifting mental maps that lie outside conventional urban imageries'. Here, these mental maps are used powerfully in a digital act of affirmation of the 'right to the city'

(Lefebvre 1996 cited in Holston 2009, 247-248). In the sidebar, this was seen in the use of the possessive adjective in the text preceding the bricolage of images and song lyrics. In the informational blog page, it was evident in the presentation of Maré as a valid location from which to write not just about life in the favela, but also about everyday life in the city.

In its naming and reference of a specific favela complex, Maré, the framing content echoes Carvalho Lopes' (2009) discussion of similar practices of visibility in the lyrics of *funk* music. Carvalho Lopes has shown how the lyrics of funk music – which make frequent references to specific favelas, and specific streets and leisure spaces within them – construct a new cartography for the city of Rio de Janeiro, one in which favelas are integrated and differentiated from each other as lived spaces. As she writes, 'the language of *funk* "gives meaning" to the favela, "making visible" other maps and "sketching out" other trajectories in the city of Rio de Janeiro' (Carvalho Lopes 2009, 379). My observations of favela residents publishing local content on blogs and other internet platforms revealed that they, like funk artists, were involved in a symbolic remapping and resignification of urban space in Rio de Janeiro, employing digital culture to engage in the production of meaning and a differential visibility for favelas and their residents, and their relationship to the city. The framing content framed not only the posts on their blogs, but also themselves as bloggers, showing that Maré was a place producing not only violence and poverty, as commonly thought, but also university students, photographers, and writers, engaged in generating their own representations of the area.

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